

# The benefits of high-quality childcare

A guide for parents  
and carers



## Childcare is good for you... and you... and you...

Childcare benefits all of us: parents, carers, employers, communities and most importantly, children. Improving local childcare services provides real advantages for everyone in the community.

Childcare comes in many forms – day nurseries, childminders, pre-schools, playgroups, nursery classes, holiday playschemes and out-of-school clubs – and there's increasing evidence to show the benefits for everyone involved.

High-quality care improves the life chances of all children – especially disadvantaged children, children from poorer homes with fewer opportunities. It boosts children's learning and gives them the chance to mix with others from a wide variety of backgrounds, while enabling parents meet other parents, train or work. There is more Government investment in childcare and early years education than ever before. There is a 10-Year Childcare Strategy which sets out the Government's plan for delivering childcare and early years education, and a Childcare Act, passed in 2006,

**// When the childcare is right, it's good for parents, for children, for everyone. If you get good childcare at the beginning, hopefully it's going to help with their future. //**

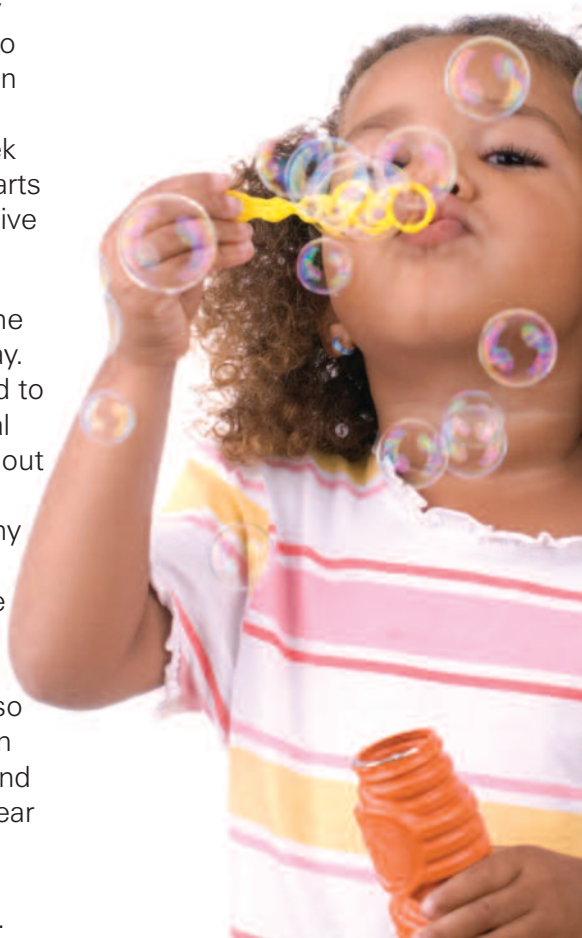
Parent

which sets out the quality standards for childcare and local authorities' legal requirements to ensure sufficient childcare in their area. By 2010 there will be a Children's Centre in every community, offering services for children and families, with some children's centres also offering childcare. Many schools now also offer 'extended services' including breakfast clubs, sports and activities, for school-aged children.

## Free part-time early education

A cornerstone of the Childcare Strategy is the entitlement for every three- and four-year-old in England to at least 12½ hours of early education free of charge for 38 weeks a year. This is increasing to 15 hours a week by September 2010, and in some parts of the country, children already receive 15 hours a week.

The free places are available from the term following a child's third birthday. Some two year olds are also entitled to some free hours – contact your local Families Information Service to find out if this is available in your area. Childcare providers must not add any extra charges to the free places parents are entitled to. Although the free place is usually 2½ hours each day, the places are becoming more flexible in many childcare settings, so you could ask for longer sessions on fewer days if that is better for you and your children. If your three- or four-year old is not accessing their free place and you would like to know more, please contact our Information Line.



## Childcare – good for children

**“It’s a social sort of thing, isn’t it? They interact, learn manners, and learn new ideas. And they’re away from the telly!”**

Parent

*“I’m not as shy as I was when I first got here a month ago. When you start new clubs you interact with new people and you speak up”*

Young person

*“It’s focused on her needs, I have to say, an excellent service we get here... She gets a social life, she gets to mix with teenagers and do something other than school... She gets to have fun, she goes to the cinema, she goes bowling, swimming... She went abseiling, I couldn’t believe it, she really did!”*

Parent of daughter with profound multiple learning disability



Good childcare gives children a great start in life, both educationally and socially. Good pre-school education between the ages of 3 and 5 helps children achieve more at school, at primary level and even beyond. When high-quality pre-school education is combined with learning at home with parents, the results are even better for children’s social and intellectual development. Findings published by the Institute of Education show that children’s achievements in language,



reading and numeracy increased in proportion to the number of months they spent in pre-school. At age five, children who had attended pre-school were between four and six months ahead of those who did not attend pre-school.

Disadvantaged children, in particular, benefit from good-quality pre-school experiences, which makes them more likely to succeed when they start school. Children who have been to a pre-school or nursery are less likely to have special educational needs when they start primary school.

Some research reports show that for some children under the age of two, long hours in poor quality group childcare may not be beneficial. That is why *high-quality* childcare is so important.

Extended schools, for school-aged children, offer clubs and activities for children to attend before and after school, as well as in the holidays, and primary schools also offer childcare as part of their extended services.

Extended schools have been successful in improving GCSE results and also have wider benefits, including engagement with learning, family stability and enhanced life chances.

Childcare providers looking after children under the age of eight have to be registered with Ofsted. Ofsted visits early years settings and makes sure that standards are being met and that children are safe. Reports are published on the Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The standards of early education and care are improving and there are more training opportunities for people working in childcare to gain higher qualifications. The Early Years Foundation Stage is the new framework of the care, learning and development for all early years settings. It sets out the standards that parents can expect from early years and childcare settings and lets them know what to look for in the highest quality childcare. For more detail, contact our Information Line or see [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs/)

## Childcare – good for families

Families use childcare for many reasons – to help parents work, look for jobs, train or study, to meet other parents or just take time out and, of course, to help their child’s development. Every family has its own set of circumstances, but everyone can benefit from access to childcare services. By using local childcare, parents are improving their children’s development and potentially also their own.

Research into the impacts of Sure Start shows that parents involved felt less isolated, more valued and more confident in their parenting. They also reported feeling a closer bond with their children who, they felt, were happier, easier to relate to, mixing better and better prepared for learning.

**“It was a safe environment, good for socialising, because I was isolated at that time. I met people, my daughter met people, and she was able to learn in a safe and fun environment.”**

Parent

High-quality early learning and childcare, plus better access to services, enables parents and carers who are working or who wish to work, train or learn, to have a greater choice in balancing their work and family life. A survey conducted by Contact a Family reported 50% of parents of disabled children as saying that changes in government policy, making childcare more accessible, would lead to a definite lifestyle change. They would go back to work, extend their current hours, or pursue further study.



## Case Study\*

**Sophia** is in her 30s and has three children aged 19, 12 and 4. When her youngest child was 2 years old he was boisterous, very jealous of other children and adults. Sophia reported having problems with alcohol misuse, numeracy and literacy, *"I have never had a qualification in my life"*, experienced depression, poor self-confidence and challenges with parenting her youngest child.

With assistance provided from her Children's Centre, Sophia's youngest child was able to take up a place at the Centre's nursery and Sophia undertook basic skills training and passed Level 2 in English and Levels 2 & 3 Maths. She began volunteering at the Centre's kitchen, did a Food & Hygiene course to contribute to the successful outcome of the Centre's inspection and is about to do an Access to Work course.

Sophia continues to volunteer at the Centre's kitchen and has put her newly acquired maths skills to use in translating individual recipes into sufficient food for 30 children.



She has assisted in introducing healthy eating to the Centre. She reports highly improved self-confidence and reduced depression.

Alongside this, Sophia's child has much improved behaviour, interacts well with other children and adults and has made a smooth transition to the local school's nursery class. His introduction to the local school was smoothed by support from the Centre's staff.

## Case Study\*



**Jane** is in her 20s and has 2 children aged 6 and 3. She hadn't worked since the birth of her first child. Her partner is self-employed and works more than 35 hours per week, but they are struggling financially. Jane was keen to return to work, both to ease their financial situation and to learn new skills and meet new people. Jane and her partner had never used childcare before other than members of her family babysitting occasionally so she was nervous about someone else looking after her children.

When Jane found a full time job, a friend gave her the contact details for her local Family Information Service to help her find out more about her childcare options. Jane's youngest child qualifies for free early years education sessions for 15 hours per week and through the Family Information Service, she found an accredited childminder near to their home who is able to offer the free sessions and also to pick up her older child from school and look after them both until Jane or her partner come home.

Jane also found that they were able to get some help with childcare costs through Working Tax Credit to pay the additional costs. Jane is enjoying her work, and is happy that her children are being well looked after by their childminder but she knows that she would not be able to work without the help they get with childcare costs.

\* Individual's names have been changed. The case study of Sophia is reproduced from Daycare Trust research with the kind permission of Oxfordshire County Council. 'Jane' was a caller to Daycare Trust's Information Line.

## Childcare – good for employment

Childcare enables parents to take up training and education, helping them move into work. Research for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) found that two out of every three mothers who did not have a job would prefer to work or study if they could afford good-quality, convenient, reliable childcare. Four out of five single mothers would prefer to work. With the changes to welfare benefits for lone parents (who now move from Income Support to Jobseekers Allowance when their eldest child is 12 – reducing to age 10 in October 2009 and age seven in October 2010), high quality and appropriate childcare and activities for school-aged children is even more crucial.

**“If there was suitable, affordable childcare it would make things a lot easier because then you can just pretty much go and do any job that you want, you haven’t got to worry when you’ve got a day off here, a day off school and a week off there.”**

Lone parent, Birmingham

Modern families are complex, with one or both parents juggling paid employment with looking after the home. This means that high-quality, affordable and appropriate childcare is increasingly important in enabling choice, autonomy and equality for men and women. Employers are recognising the changing patterns of employment, and the implications this has for the management of their workforce.

*“Supporting childcare can allow [employers] to recruit from a broader pool of talent. It will help to attract the best applicants to vacancies... and to retain staff.”*

(Supporting Childcare Makes Good Business Sense  
[www.surestart.gov.uk/\\_doc/P0002254.pdf](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0002254.pdf))

There is financial help with the cost of childcare for employed parents: either through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, which funds up to 80 percent of registered childcare costs; or through Employer Supported Childcare schemes, for example, childcare vouchers. For more information on financial support for childcare see

[www.payingforchildcare.org.uk](http://www.payingforchildcare.org.uk)

## Childcare – good for the economy

Better childcare has significant effects on the national economy allowing more mothers to work. It increases women's earnings, in the long-term, and their contribution to the country.

Research in the USA has shown that public expenditure on childcare saves money in the long-run with less money being needed for education, healthcare and welfare.

## Childcare – good for the community

Childcare has benefits for the whole community, with more positive attitudes and productive lives for today's children when they grow up. Children's Centres are being set up all around the country with a range of activities for young children and their parents (such as stay and play sessions, toy libraries and health visitor drop-in sessions), and extended schools provide activities for school-aged children before and after school, as well as support for families. To find out what is happening to your area, contact your local Families' Information Service (see [www.familyinformationservices.org.uk](http://www.familyinformationservices.org.uk))

## Childcare – good for everyone

Investing in quality childcare benefits children, their parents and the wider community. It brings improvements in children's learning and behaviour, leading to a happier family life – and even a healthier national economy.

### It's just common sense.

\*For a full list of reports and publications referred to in this booklet and for suggestions of further reading, please contact Daycare Trust.

## Finding out what is on offer:

There is a lot of information on how to find good local childcare – see [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk). Each local authority has a Family Information Service which provides helpful information- ring 0800 2 346346 or see [www.familyinformationservices.org.uk](http://www.familyinformationservices.org.uk) to find out about your local Service.

There is also help available with childcare costs. For more information, contact the Daycare Trust Information Line on 0845 872 6251 or see [www.payingforchildcare.org.uk](http://www.payingforchildcare.org.uk)

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality, accessible, affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We advise parents and carers, providers, employers, trade unions and policymakers on childcare issues.

Established in 1986, Daycare Trust has seen its campaigning translate into policy change, including the establishment of the national childcare strategy. However, access to quality childcare services is still dependent on where families live and on their income. Daycare Trust is uniquely qualified to give a voice to parents facing a multiple range of challenges. Please support our campaign for quality affordable childcare for all.

## Daycare Trust Information Line

0845 872 6251 (local rate call)

**Open on** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (10am – 1pm, 2pm - 5pm) and Wednesday (2pm – 5pm)

Interpretation services are available if required. Parents and carers should call our Information Line to get impartial information and on childcare issues such as free entitlement, help with childcare costs and accessing childcare.

Information, including helpful factsheets, is also available online at [www.daycaretrust.org.uk](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk) and [www.payingforchildcare.org.uk](http://www.payingforchildcare.org.uk) or email us at [info@daycaretrust.org.uk](mailto:info@daycaretrust.org.uk)

## Become part of our Parent network

It is free to sign up and you will receive:

- Our quarterly newsletter *Childwise*
- Free factsheets available to download from our website
- Opportunities to join our campaigns, parents panel, surveys and consultations.

To sign-up call us on 0207 840 3350 or email [membership@daycaretrust.org.uk](mailto:membership@daycaretrust.org.uk) or visit our website.

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